

PM piles files on Freeland; Implementer-in-chief will work on climate, health, safety portfolios, and more

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Body

Justin Trudeau has given marching orders to cabinet ministers and signalled that Chrystia Freeland will be his implementer-in-chief and lead minister on all top files to do with provinces, Indigenous people and other ministers to nail down a new NAFTA, a national universal pharmacare program and action on climate change.

Freeland already had the big titles: deputy prime minister, intergovernmental affairs minister and a key player on cabinet committees, including chairing the committee on economy and the environment. But now she's got explicit instructions to lead "key cabinet work streams in the achievement of national commitments to Canadians."

Trudeau wrote that her to-do list includes working with the ministers of finance, Bill Morneau, and health, Patty Hajdu, to renew health agreements to implement campaign promises to ensure "that every Canadian has access to a family doctor or primary health-care team; set national standards for mental-health services; make home care and palliative care more available; and continue to implement national universal pharmacare."

Freeland has already been the key point of contact for the government with the Prairie premiers since the federal election highlighted divisions in the country and the deep antipathy in the west toward the Liberals.

Now, Trudeau's mandate letter for her outlines in detail that it's her job to work with Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson to keep the climate action plan on track and, in fact, boost it.

Freeland is instructed to introduce "additional carbon reduction measures that exceed current 2030 targets and firmly put Canada on a trajectory to net-zero emissions by 2050."

Trudeau says he expects her to work closely with Seamus O'Regan, the minister in charge of natural resources, including the oil and gas industry, but leaves little doubt the direction the Liberal government sees for the industry, saying he wants to ensure the energy sector "is a full partner in this transition to a cleaner economy and that we continue our work to get our natural resources to world markets."

Freeland is tasked to work with Public Safety Minister Bill Blair to introduce a national ban on all military-style assault rifles and work with the provinces and territories to give municipalities the ability to further restrict or ban handguns.

Freeland is charged with helping to create the promised quarter million before- and after-school spaces for kids under 10 "while providing additional support for early childhood educators and laying the groundwork for a pan-Canadian child care system."

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She is tasked with leading more work to persuade the provinces and territories to implement the Canada Free Trade Agreement and eliminate barriers to trade between them, up to and including using constitutional federal powers to regulate interprovincial trade and commerce. Trudeau orders Freeland to create a Canada Free Trade Tribunal "to hear, investigate, and help resolve cases where domestic trade barriers may exist."

Freeland is additionally given the task of overseeing the work of colleagues Mélanie Joly on regional economic development and Jim Carr and Pablo Rodriguez, Trudeau's representatives tasked with acting as the government's eyes and ears on the Prairie provinces and Quebec.

As Trudeau's deputy prime minister, Freeland will help host a first ministers meeting in early 2020, and is to support Trudeau and his minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Carolyn Bennett at a separate meeting he says will aim specifically at how to "continue to advancing reconciliation."

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